

## Section 813. Big Box Development Standards

1. **Purpose.** The purposes of these regulations are:
  - A. To break up the apparent mass and scale of large retail structures and to ensure that such development is compatible with and does not detract from Carrollton's unique character, scale, and sense of place;
  - B. To help integrate large-scale retail development with its surroundings;
  - C. To promote and facilitate a safe and comfortable pedestrian scale environment;
  - D. To encourage a mixture of uses and sizes of structures; and
  - E. To reduce the visual impact of large areas of parking.
2. **Applicability.** The following development is subject to the requirements of this section in addition to compliance with all other City requirements:
  - A. New construction of retail establishments exceeding 50,000 gross square feet of floor area serving a single tenant or multiple tenants in a single structure or development.
  - B. Additions of 10% or more to the gross square footage of the floor area of an existing retail structure, that is already at 40,000 gross square feet or larger, or that would become 50,000 gross square feet or more after the addition; or
  - C. When the valuation of the proposed remodeling project exceeds 10% of the value of all existing retail structures in the development, and the gross floor area exceeds 50,000 square feet.
3. **Exceptions.** The Planning Commission may grant waivers to the standards of this section under the following circumstances:
  - A. Strict application of the standard would result in peculiar or exceptional practical difficulties or exceptional and undue hardship upon the owner of the property; or
  - B. The proposed alternative building or site design satisfies the intent of the ordinance as well or better than would strict compliance with the standard; or
  - C. The new siting of parking areas and buildings in relation to the street is not possible with the remodel or addition; and
  - D. Granting of the waiver would not impose significantly more negative impacts on nearby properties.

4. **Size and Mass.** No single retail establishment greater than 150,000 gross square feet is permitted. However, the total structure can be larger than 150,000 gross square feet so long as no single retail space exceeds 150,000 gross square feet.
5. **Maximum Height.** Height shall not exceed the maximum established for the applicable zoning district, but shall be further restricted as follows if the large-scale retail development is adjacent to residential development: The height of any portion of a structure within 100 feet of a residential zoning district shall not exceed to the maximum permitted height allowed within the residential district.
6. **Building Design.** Buildings should have architectural features and patterns that provide visual interest, at the scale of the pedestrian, reduce massive aesthetic effects, and reflect the local character. The following elements should be integral parts of the building fabric, and not superficially applied trim or graphics, or paint: color changes, material changes, texture changes and relief feature (such as offsets, projections and reveals):
  - A. **Architectural Unity.** All buildings on the same site shall be architecturally unified. This provision shall apply to new construction, additions and remodeling. Architectural unity means that buildings shall be related in architectural style, color scheme, and building materials.
  - B. **Exterior Materials.** Predominant exterior building materials shall be high quality material. Predominant exterior buildings materials shall be high quality materials. These include, without limitation: brick, exterior wood siding, rock, stone or tinted and textured concrete masonry units. Facade colors shall be neutral or earth tone colors. Building trim and accent areas may feature brighter colors, including primary colors, but these colors may not comprise more than 15% of any building facade. The use of high intensity, metallic, black or fluorescent colors is prohibited. Building trim and accent areas may feature brighter colors, including primary colors. Exterior building materials shall not include the following:
    - (1) Smooth-faced concrete block;
    - (2) Smooth-faced tilt-up concrete panels; or
    - (3) Pre-fabricated steel panels.
  - C. **Facades and Exterior Walls.** The following standards, which apply to all building facades which are visible from adjoining public streets or properties, are intended to reduce the massive scale of large buildings which, without application of these standards, be incompatible with City's desired character.
    - (1) Facades greater than 150 feet in length, measured horizontally, shall incorporate wall plane projections or recesses having a depth of at least 3% of the length of the facade and extending at least 20% of the length of the facade. No uninterrupted length of any facade shall exceed 150 horizontal feet.

- (2) Ground floor facades of retail businesses that face public streets shall have arcades, display windows, entry areas, awnings, or other such features along no less than 60% of their horizontal length, excepting side and rear facades that are landscaped with a type C buffer. (See **Section 708**)

D. **Roofs.** The following standards are intended to foster variations in roof lines to add interest to, and reduce the massive scale of, large buildings. Roof features should complement the character of adjoining development. Roofs shall have no less than two of the following features:

- (1) Parapets concealing flat roofs and rooftop equipment, such as HVAC units from public view. The average height of such parapets shall not exceed 15% of the height of the supporting wall and such parapets shall not at any point exceed one-third of the height of the supporting wall. Such parapets shall feature three dimensional cornice treatment and shall not be of a constant height for a distance of greater than 150 feet.
- (2) Overhanging eaves, extending no less than 3 feet past the supporting walls, for no less than 30% of the building perimeter.
- (3) Sloping roofs that do not exceed the average height of the supporting walls, with an average slope greater than or equal to 1 foot of vertical rise for every 3 feet of horizontal run and less than or equal to 1 foot of vertical rise for every 1 foot of horizontal run.
- (4) Three or more roof slope planes.

E. **Entryways.** Entryway design elements and variations should give orientation and aesthetically pleasing character to the building. The following standards identify desirable entryway design features:

- (1) Large retail buildings shall feature multiple entrances that are separated by not more than 300 feet along any side of a building requiring customer entrances. Multiple building entrances reduce walking distances from cars, facilitate pedestrian and bicycle access from public sidewalks, and provide convenience where certain entrances offer access to individual stores, or identified departments of a store. Multiple entrances also mitigate the effect of the unbroken walls and neglected areas that often characterize building facades that face bordering land uses.
- (2) All sides of a principal building that directly face an abutting public street shall feature at least one customer entrance. Where a principal building directly faces more than two abutting public streets, this requirement shall apply only to two sides of the building, including the

side of the building facing the Transportation Corridor, and another side of the building facing another street.

- (3) When structures are adjacent to a residentially-zoned district and separated from that district by either a public or private street, and where residential uses front or may reasonably be expected to front that street, the structure shall have at least one entryway facing that street.
- (4) Each principal building on a site shall have clearly defined, highly visible customer entrances featuring no less than three (3) of the following:
  - a. Canopies or porticos;
  - b. Overhangs;
  - c. Recesses/projections;
  - d. Arcades;
  - e. Raised corniced parapets over the door;
  - f. Peaked roof forms;
  - g. Arches;
  - h. Outdoor patios;
  - i. Display windows;
  - j. Architectural details, such as tile work and moldings which are integrated into the building structure and design; or
  - k. Integral planters or wing walls that incorporate landscaped areas and/or places for sitting.

F. **Multiple Entryways.** Multiple entryways or architectural features shall be incorporated into the design in order to break up the apparent mass and scale of large retail structures. Entrances may be to tenant spaces other than the primary retail tenant.

- (1) For structures greater than 50,000 gross square feet but less than 75,000 gross square feet, there shall be a clearly articulated public entrance on at least two sides of the structure. At least one such entrance shall be visible from a public street and connected to that street by a pedestrian sidewalk.
- (2) Structures with tenants greater than 75,000 gross square feet shall provide either a significant pedestrian amenity or a public entrance at a minimum of one per 75 linear feet of publicly visible facade. The public entrance may be to either the principal retail use or to any other tenant. Examples of significant pedestrian amenities include, but are not limited to, outdoor seating areas, play areas for children, and public courtyards. This provision shall not apply to more than three sides of any structure.

7. **Site Design.** All buildings and enclosures shall be designed to be compatible with the primary structure. Compatibility shall be measured in terms of design, form, use of materials and color.

A. **Integration into the Street Network.** Internal and new streets shall connect to existing streets or be designed to facilitate future connections to the maximum extent possible.

B. **Minimum Tenant Mix.** Developments with single retail tenants occupying more than 75,000 square feet of gross floor area shall provide additional tenant spaces that total at least twenty-five (25) percent of the total floor area.

*Note: See attached discussion of optional ways to address issue of vacant big boxes.*

C. **Community Spaces.** Large retail developments shall provide outdoor spaces and amenities to link structures with the remainder of the community. Passenger drop-off/pick-up points shall be integrated with traffic patterns on the site. Special design features shall enhance the building's function as a center of community activity. Each retail development shall provide at least two of the following design features, which shall be constructed of materials that match the principal structure and linked by sidewalks to the principal structure:

- (1) Patio/seating area,
- (2) Pedestrian plaza with benches,
- (3) Window shopping walkway,
- (4) Outdoor playground area,
- (5) Kiosk area,
- (6) Water feature, clock tower, or
- (7) Other focal feature approved by the Mayor and City Council.

D. **Landscaping:** all buildings with more than 50,000 square feet of floor area shall provide the following landscaping:

- (1) **Peripheral.** A landscaped buffer of at least twenty (20) feet in width shall be provided along all property lines abutting roadways, with breaks for approved access points. A minimum 15 ft. wide landscape buffer shall be planted along all other property lines. No parking is permitted within these required landscape areas. The minimum setback for any building facade shall be fifty (50) feet from the nearest property line. Where the facade faces adjacent residentially zoned property, a school, park or cemetery, a minimum 6 feet tall earthen

berm shall be provided, which shall have evergreen trees planted at intervals of not more than 20 feet on center.

- (2) **Parking Lot Landscaping:** A minimum of five 5% of the area within the boundaries of the parking lot shall be landscaped. Landscaped areas shall be protected by raised curbs or fixed wheel stops approved by the City Engineer, and shall be a minimum of 150 square feet in size. No parking space shall be located more than 100 feet from a tree. Shrubs shall be planted at a ratio of four for every required tree.

E. **Lighting.** Light design and installation shall emphasize low-level uniform lighting to avoid abrupt changes from bright lights to darkness.

- (1) Parking and security lights shall not be taller than buildings or a maximum of 24 feet above pavement, whichever is less; and
- (2) All lights shall be directed downwards, with the primary cone of light extending no more than sixty (60) degrees from a vertical line extending downward from the light source.

F. **Pedestrian Circulation:** Pedestrian accessibility opens auto-oriented developments to nearby neighborhoods, thereby reducing traffic impacts and enabling the development to project a friendlier, more inviting image. It is permissible to have pedestrians cross vehicular traffic within the parking lot so long as a sidewalk is provided. This section sets forth standards for public sidewalks and internal pedestrian circulation systems that will provide user-friendly pedestrian access as well as pedestrian safety, shelter, and convenience. All buildings with more than 50,000 square feet of floor area shall provide the following:

- (1) Sidewalks at least five (5) feet in width shall be provided along all sides of the lot that abut a public street.
- (2) Continuous internal pedestrian walkways, no less than five (5) feet in width, shall be provided from the public sidewalk or right-of-way to the principal customer entrance of all principal buildings on the site. At a minimum, walkways shall connect focal points of pedestrian activity such as, but not limited to, transit stops, street crossings, building and store entry points, and shall feature adjoining landscaped areas that includes trees, shrubs, benches, flower beds, groundcover, or other such materials for no less than 50% of its length.
- (3) Sidewalks, no less than 6 feet in width, shall be provided along the full length of the building along any facade featuring a customer entrance, and along any facade abutting public parking areas. Such sidewalks shall be located at least six (6) feet from the facade of the building to

provide planting beds for foundation landscaping, except where features such as arcades or entryways are part of the facade.

- (4) Weather protection features such as awnings or arcades shall extend at least twenty (20) feet from all customer entrances.
- (5) All internal pedestrian walkways shall be distinguished from driving surfaces through the use of durable, low maintenance surface materials such as pavers, bricks, or scored concrete to enhance pedestrian safety and comfort, as well as the attractiveness of the walkways.

G. **Parking Lot Orientation.** Parking areas should provide safe, convenient, and efficient access. They should be distributed around large buildings in order to shorten the distance to other buildings and public sidewalks and to reduce the overall scale of the paved surface. When buildings are located closer to streets, pedestrian traffic is encouraged and architectural details take on added importance. To achieve this, for any retail building, no more than twenty (20) percent of the off-street parking area for the entire property shall be located between the principal building(s) and an arterial street, unless other buildings located between the principal building and the arterial street extend along at least fifty (50) percent of the frontage between the arterial and the principal building..

H. **Number of Spaces; Exceptions.** For the purposes of this section, the maximum number of parking spaces provided shall not exceed the minimum number required by more than 10%. Reductions in the number of required spaces shall be allowed based on the mixture of land uses.

I. **Outdoor Storage, Trash Collection and Loading Areas.** The following standards are intended to reduce the impacts of outdoor storage, loading and operations areas on adjacent land uses.

- (1) Areas for truck parking and loading shall be screened by a combination of structures and evergreen landscaping to minimize visibility from adjacent streets and residential district lines.
- (2) Outdoor storage, loading and operations areas shall be attractively screened from adjacent parcels and streets.
- (3) Outdoor storage, trash collection and/or compaction, loading or other such uses shall be located in the rear of the lot. If because of lot configuration the Director determines that such placement is not feasible, then the side yard may be used, but in no case shall such area(s) be located within 20 feet of any public street, public sidewalk or on-site pedestrian way.

- (4) Outdoor storage, HVAC equipment, trash collection, trash compaction and other service functions shall be incorporated into the overall site design. Views of these areas shall be screened from visibility from all property lines and separated from sidewalks and on-site pedestrian ways. Screening structures shall be made of the same materials as the principal structure;
- (5) Areas for the storage and sale of seasonal merchandise shall be permanently defined and screened with walls and/or fences. Materials, colors and design of screening walls and/or fences shall conform to those used as in the principal structure. If such areas are to be covered, then the covering shall conform to the colors on the building.
- (6) Outdoor display and storage shall not encroach on any portion of a walkway, drive aisles or required parking spaces. No areas for outdoor storage, trash collection or compaction, loading, or other such uses shall be located within 30 feet of any internal pedestrian way.

#### **Discussion of Big Box Vacancy Strategies.**

Vacant retail space is a key issue facing many communities today. It is particularly difficult to fill big box retail spaces that have been vacated. Left alone these spaces consume valuable commercial land, provide little tax value and create an image of blight and poor economic health. Carrollton currently has several such empty retail spaces and Georgia ranks second in the nation for the number of vacated big boxes. Communities have pursued the following strategies to avoid having empty boxes:

**Limit total retail space** – this strategy requires an assessment of commercial demand and limits zoning and construction of retail space that exceeds projected demands. The two significant challenges to this approach are determining how much space is needed and avoiding the development of retail space just outside jurisdictional boundaries.

**Limiting the size of retail spaces.** This approach is based on the assumption that smaller retail spaces are easier to fill. The obvious challenge is that high volume discount chains base their business on having large quantities of goods on display, requiring large spaces.

**Requiring big boxes to be attached to larger developments with separate tenants.** While this approach softens the impact of a vacancy, often the disappearance of an anchoring big box will diminish the health of remaining businesses that rely on spillover business from the big box retailer.

**Requiring that big box developers provide assurances that big boxes will be redeveloped or removed if left vacant for more than a specified time period.** Increasingly, communities are finding that this is the most effective means of addressing vacant big boxes. By shifting the burden of filling, redeveloping or removing the big box to the developer, the communities



increase the cost of business for the developer, but minimize the risks of being stuck with vacant big box retail space.